

Illinois State Historic Preservation Office Preliminary National Register Evaluation Form



This form will make it possible for the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to evaluate the property and to give you a staff opinion about its potential for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. **Staff will provide an eligibility opinion letter within 30 days of receiving this preliminary application.**

Please e-mail the application form to Andrew or Amy (see below). You can send multiple pdfs if necessary. Photos also need to be submitted in pdf format. Make sure each photo is labeled on the page. No more than two photos per page.

Call or e-mail if you have any questions:

Andrew Heckenkamp, Survey & National Register Coordinator
andrew.heckenkamp@illinois.gov - (217) 785-4324

Amy Hathaway, Survey & National Register Specialist
amy.hathaway@illinois.gov – (217) 782-8588

Checklist: Include the following additional supporting documentation

- ☐ **Photographs** interior & exterior keyed to floor plan and/or site plan. JPEG or PDF in color
- ☐ **Floor Plans** Do not have to be to scale (rough sketch of room layouts)
- ☐ **Site Plan** if more than two resources on property
- ☐ **Location Map** Google Earth, Bing, or any INTERNET mapping website

There are additional requirements for preliminary determinations of potential historic districts and archaeological sites.

Please contact us directly.

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Contact Information

Name/Organization: Dale C. Maley - Livingston County Historical Society

Address: 17 Brookwood Court, Fairbury, IL 61739

E-mail: DaleMaley@gmail.com

Phone number: 815-692-6633

Historic Property Information

Historic name (if known): The Strevell House

Number and street name: 401 W. Livingston

City or village: Pontiac, IL 61764

County: Livingstonston County

If there is no historic name, enter "none." If there is no street address include the road or nearest road. If there is no city or village put vicinity of nearest village or city

Indicate why you are seeking National Register designation.

Recognition ☒

Incentives ☐

Threatened Property ☐

Other (fill in blank) ☐

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History & Significance

Explain below why this property is important to the local community or to the State of Illinois. A property may be significant for its architectural design, important person(s) it was associated with or for its associated history. In some cases a property may be significant for multiple reasons. **If you believe the property is significant for its architectural design, you must also submit addresses and photos of other similar examples in the community.**

This property is important for two specific reasons: 1) It is the only known structure still in existence in Livingston County with known direct ties to Abraham Lincoln, 2) It is the only house in Pontiac which utilizes a Carpenter Gothic style architecture in a wood structure.

Direct Tie to Abraham Lincoln

The Pontiac Men's Literary Association asked Abraham Lincoln at least twice to travel to Pontiac and give a lecture. Lincoln finally decided to go to Pontiac and give a lecture at the Presbyterian Church on Friday, January 27, 1860. Lincoln delivered his lecture, but his train back to Bloomington did not leave Pontiac until 1 AM. Jason Strevell, a young lawyer in Pontiac, invited Mr. Lincoln to stay at his house at 401 W. Livingston until his train arrived.

Mr. Strevell and Mr. Lincoln talked politics for many hours at the house at 401 W. Livingston. At some point in the conversation, Mr. Strevell asked Mr. Lincoln how tall he was. Mr. Lincoln said he was 6 feet 4 inches tall. Mr. Strevell wanted to confirm this height, so he measured Mr. Lincoln's height in a doorway at the house using a ruler. Mr. Lincoln measured height came in just under 6 feet 4 inches tall.

Mr. Lincoln then took his train to Bloomington. Mr. Strevell went to the Illinois Republican Convention in Decatur and helped to nominate Mr. Lincoln as the Republican presidential candidate. Mr. Lincoln later invited Mr. and Mrs. Strevell to visit him at the White House, but the Strevell's never took him up on his offer. Mr. Lincoln did appoint Mr. Strevell to be a clerk at the Customs House in New Orleans. Mr. Strevell tried out the New Orleans job, but moved back to Pontiac when the annual yellow fever and cholera epidemic killed many citizens in New Orleans. Mr. Strevell served two terms in the Illinois State lower house and one term as an Illinois State Senator.

There are two references which document Lincoln's visit to Pontiac. The January 31st, 1860, edition of the Pontiac Sentinel has an article about Lincoln giving his lecture in Pontiac. Charles Nettleton Strevell wrote a book in 1943 titled "As I Recall Them." In that book, C. N. Strevell included a letter that his father, Jason W. Strevell sent him on March 21, 1901, in which Jason Strevell describes in detail the afternoon and evening that Mr. Lincoln spent at his home at 401 W. Livingston.

In summary, the Strevell House at 401 W. Livingston, is of great historical significance because it is the only remaining structure in Livingston County with direct ties to Abraham Lincoln.

Carpenter Gothic Style Architecture

Prior to coming to Pontiac, Illinois, Zelus H. Nettleton, a carpenter, built two houses in Constantine, Michigan. He built a Greek Revival style house in 1847 and it is on the Registry of Historic Places. The application to get this house on the National Registry can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/yc3fys9e>.

While he was in Constantine, Zelus H. Nettleton also built a Carpenter Gothic house with many features similar to the Carpenter Gothic style house he later built in Pontiac at 401 W. Livingston Street. This home is a private residence and the date it was built is unknown. This home is referenced in the application for the Greek Revival home to be on the National Registry.

Zelus H. Nettleton purchased the land where the home at 401 W. Livingston is located on July 26, 1855, per the title/abstract for the home. He likely had the home constructed by the end of 1855 or in early 1856. Unfortunately, Zelus H. Nettleton died in 1857 and Jason W. Strevell married his widow in 1858, and moved into the house.

There are no known Carpenter Gothic wooden houses still standing in Livingston County. The Jones House at 314 E. Madison in Pontiac is the oldest brick home in Pontiac, Illinois, and it was built using the Gothic Revival style in Brick. This brick house is on the Registry and the application can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/29zz5bdw>.

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Current physical description and integrity statement:

Explain below, or on a separate sheet of paper, what the property currently looks like. **Describe physical changes that have occurred to the property since it was originally constructed.** Examples of changes include exterior additions, replacement of original siding, storefront replacement on a commercial building, removal/addition of porch, removal of original decorative details on the exterior, and replacement of original doors or windows. Also, changes to the interior like removal of original interior walls/partitions, flooring, fireplace mantels, staircases, or updated kitchens and bathrooms. Indicate whether the property has been moved from its original location. **A property that has been covered in non-historic siding (like vinyl), would disqualify it from individual consideration.**

By 2007, the home had been converted to apartments and the building was in a bad state of repair. The owner was ready to knock down the house. Three Pontiac men purchased the home for \$40,000 in 2008 with the idea of refurbishing it and then donating it to the Livingston County Historical Society.

It took 10 years to fully restore the house to its original condition when Abraham Lincoln visited it on January 27, 1860. An old-house expert, Tom Nance, was hired to examine the house and then direct the Historical Society in the best way to return it to its original condition. He made three visits to the home during the refurbishment process. His reports are still available documenting his findings and recommendations.

As best as experts could determine, the east side of the home was constructed first, and it is similar in design to the Carpenter Gothic house that Zelus Nettleton built at 185 W. Third Street in Constantine, Michigan. Mr. Nettleton died in 1857 and Jason W. Strevell, a young lawyer from New York, married his widow and moved into the home. It is theorized that Mr. Strevell had the east addition built, which roughly doubled the size of the home. This addition was done before Abraham Lincoln visited the home in 1860. The configuration of the house has remained the same except for a small addition which is now the restroom in the refurbished home.

The original wood siding on the exterior was retained. All of the windows were sent to a restoration firm in Odell, Illinois, who returned them to their original condition. The intricate teardrops on the roof eaves were repaired to original condition. The top spires were rebuilt to the same configuration as the originals.

All of the interior features were restored to their original condition including paint schemes. The original color of the exterior wood siding was red with white trim and this paint scheme was used to repaint the house.

See the attached PDF file showing the current condition of the home on the exterior and interior.